

Pronghorn

Description:

Pronghorns are fast. How fast? They are the speediest land mammal in North America, and we have around 15,000 in Idaho. This hoofed mammal is the sole surviving member of the family Antilocapridae, dating back 20 million years. Nicknames are the prongbuck, pronghorned antelope and American antelope.

Better Look Quickly

If you are quick enough to get a look at a pronghorn, you will notice that the pronghorn's upper body and legs are tan to brown in color. The lower body, including the cheeks, chest, belly, and rump, are all lighter brown to white. This two-toned coloring is interrupted with a broad, black band down the snout, a black nose, and black neck patch. This black band is a good way to tell a pronghorn apart from deer.

Directly over a pronghorn's large eyes are their black horns, different from the antlers found on elk or moose. Horns are hollow sheaths formed over a permanently-attached bony core that grows from the skull. Antlers are instead shed each year. Pronghorn are the only species to annually shed their horn sheath and are also the only animal to have a forked horn design. Horns of the males are 12-18 inches in length, but the female's horns are much smaller, usually no bigger than 6-8 inches. Just after mating season, the pronghorn sheds its horns and only the permanent core remains.

The pronghorn has a slender, muscular, and graceful, deer-like body. Male pronghorns are slightly larger than the female species. Pronghorns usually stand about three to four feet high at the shoulder and average between three to five feet long.

Wide Open Spaces

The pronghorn inhabits open plains and semi-deserts, living alone or in small bands in summer and forming large herds in winter. Being highly mobile, the pronghorn may cover a large area during the year. Pronghorns successfully survive both bitter cold temperatures of 50 below zero and desert heats of up to 130 degrees. Because of their ability to adapt to various temperatures, pronghorn are abundant throughout various areas of the West and Southwest, and from Saskatchewan, Canada south to Mexico.

Always needing to be on the lookout for predators, the pronghorn combines alternate snatches of sleep with quick feedings. Pronghorn are selective and smart foragers; they are smart about when they eat because if they aren't careful, they could be eaten at any moment! They feed on forbs, shrubs, grasses, juniper, and domestic crops. If necessary, a pronghorn can go days without water and will eat and thrive on plants no other grazing animal will touch, even thorny cactus. In winter, desert pronghorn populations favor sagebrush, a plant most animals won't consume.

Can Anything Catch Me?

Predators probably aren't going to catch a pronghorn unless they surprise it, but even trying to surprise a pronghorn is tricky! Pronghorn eyes are exceptionally large relative to the animal's size and are set high on either side of their head. Pronghorn inhabit open terrain so they can take advantage of their excellent eyesight to spot predators ahead of time. They are able to detect movement up to four miles away!

Pronghorns stick together with a very unusual but effective method of warning others in the herd of danger. Special muscles allow the pronghorn to raise its white rump hairs to instantly signal a danger message to the entire herd. At the same time, they give off a musky odor which can be detected for more than a mile. The greatest losses of pronghorn fawns to predators such as bobcats, eagles and coyotes occur during the first two months of life.

The "Rocket" of the American West

The pronghorn is second only to the cheetah in speed. But while cheetahs are winded after a quarter-mile, a pronghorn can maintain a 60 mph pace for three or four minutes. It can comfortably cruise at 30 mph for up to five miles before slowing. A pronghorn could keep up with your car for quite a while!

Many special adaptations make the pronghorn capable of lightning speed. Pronghorns consume three times the oxygen of similarly sized animals because they have an oversized trachea (windpipe), huge lungs, and a large heart. Even pronghorn muscle cells are adapted to allow them to utilize the oxygen more efficiently. Pronghorns also run with their mouths open, not because they are tired, but because it allows the animals to take in even more air. Wouldn't you think all that running would start to hurt? Well, pronghorn hooves are actually padded to minimize shock and their leg bones are extremely powerful.

Even the Young Ones are Fast!

In late summer or early fall, male pronghorns gather a group of about three or four does called a "harem." After females are pregnant for about 250 days, twin fawns are born weighing about six to ten pounds. At birth, fawns lack the spots that are characteristic of deer and elk fawns. At birth, newborns lie motionless for hours in tall grass while the mother grazes. However, within a day or two, the 16-inch-tall fawn will be able to sprint at speeds up to 25 mph. After a week of nursing, the does and fawns rejoin the herd.



Pronghorn
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Footprint

No Map
Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Pronghorn
2. **Scientific Name:** *Antilocapra americana*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: Male (Buck) - 110 to 140 lbs.
Weight: Female (Doe) - 90 to 125 lbs.
Weight: Newborn (Calf) - 6 to 10 lbs.
5. **Diet:** Forbs, shrubs, grasses, juniper, and sometimes cacti, domestic crops, and sagebrush.
6. **Young:** Usually 2 per year; called fawns.
7. **Lifespan:** 9 to 10 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Antilocapridae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** Yes
10. **Hunting Link:**